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POSTHUMOUS PAPERS BY PROFESSOR ALLEN.

THE THANATOS SCENE IN THE ALCESTIS.

THE prologue of Euripides's *Alcestis* is in two parts, — a soliloquy of Apollo and a dialogue between Apollo and Death. I have long thought it demonstrable that this second scene (verses 24–76) is a later addition to the play. It contains, as every reader of the *Alcestis* knows, many troublesome obscurities of expression, but it is not on these that I would lay stress at present. The decisive points seem rather to be the following.

1. The errand of Thanatos is to put Alcestis to death (κτείνειν, 49), more specifically to cut the fatal lock of hair, and thus devote her to the nether gods (74 ff.). As this is called *κατάρξασθαι*,¹ and as Thanatos is acting in the capacity of *ἱερεὺς θανόντων* (25), it is clear that the analogy of a sacrifice is uppermost in the poet's mind. It follows that the cutting of the lock is an act preliminary to the actual slaying. The writer has evidently forgotten that Alcestis is already in the death-throes (*ψυχορραγοῦσα*, 20) before the arrival of Thanatos. And if, contrary to reason, we suppose the finishing stroke to be meant by *κατάρξασθαι*, we are met by the fact that Alcestis dies quietly before the spectators' eyes, no Thanatos being present. It is true that she sees (253 ff.) both the ferryman Charon and a person called in our text a winged Hades, but she sees them with her mind's eye.² The fact is, there is absolutely no place for the function of

¹ Compare *Iph. Taur.*, 40.

² Many, nevertheless, have identified this 'winged Hades' with the Thanatos of the prologue. They are obliged to suppose that the god who enters the house visible to the spectators comes out of it invisible to them. Even Carl Robert, in his excellent brochure *Thanatos* (Berlin, 1879), p. 35, acquiesces in this view, and evades the difficult question why Alcestis speaks of Hades instead of Thanatos by adopting a conjecture of v. Wilamowitz, βλέπων πτερωτὸς Ἄϊδα. We have

the death-god (as described 74 ff.) in Alcestis's last hours as set forth in the body of the play. The account there given, in the servant's narrative (141 ff. followed by the scene 213 ff.), is this: Alcestis rises in the morning, bathes and adorns herself, prays to Hestia, and makes the round of the domestic shrines, pays a farewell visit to her chamber, and takes leave of her household. We hear nothing of any sudden seizure, but presently it appears that she is wasting with disease (203 f., compare 19 f.). Desiring to look once more upon the sun, she is borne into the open air, and here, her strength waning by degrees, she expires.

2. The conception of the prologue is that Thanatos comes to the house to fetch Alcestis and carry her incontinently to Hades (*μέλλει κατάρχειν*, 26; *ἤκεις μέτα*, 46; *ἀπάξομαι*, 47). In the play we meet with a very different notion. Alcestis dies, is carried into the palace, is taken out and buried, and then Thanatos comes to the tomb to fetch her, and is overpowered there by Heracles. This comes out clearly enough in the passage 834 ff. Heracles expects (834) to find Alcestis at the tomb, not yet—that is—carried off to Hades. Here he proposes to await (*φυλάξαι*) Thanatos and seize him from ambush, while he is partaking of the blood-offerings there made to him—the regular means of summoning the denizens of the lower world. The expression *ἦν μὴ μόλῃ* (850) is significant. It cannot mean that Thanatos, with Alcestis in charge, may take some other way to Hades and avoid the site of burial. Rather, it contemplates the possibility that Thanatos (a deity of rank, 843, 1140) may not come for Alcestis in person, but send some minister in his place.

3. If I mistake not, there is another inconsistency between the second part of the prologue and the play itself. The notion pervades 32, 34 (*αἶψά*), 43, 45, that Admetus's death-day is already past, a separate day being set for Alcestis. But elsewhere (12 ff., 523 f., especially 694-701) the underlying conception is the more reason-

already explained our suspicion. This conjecture may or may not be right, but the identification is wholly disproved by the mention of Charon (*πορθμεύς*). Both Charon and his winged companion are equally hallucinations of the dying woman, and neither is understood by the poet to be really present. I may add in passing that I fully agree with Robert in his assertion that Hades and Thanatos are distinct personages throughout this play.

able one, that Alcestis dies on Admetus's day. It follows, of course, that Admetus has been forewarned of his approaching fate. This service, as well as the provision for evading his fate, he owes, no doubt, to Apollo. The misconception of the interpolator arose from a hurried reading of 11 (*θανεῖν ἐρρυσάμην*).

4. If Death enters the house at 76, how and when does he leave it? He is next heard of at the tomb (845, 1140 ff.). Does he depart by a postern gate, or does he become all at once invisible to the spectators? ¹

We are disposed to allow a reasonable latitude to the poetic fancy. But when we consider that these contradictions relate to the fundamental conception of the plot, and that they are all massed within a single passage of fifty-three lines, — a passage abounding in other infelicities, which have much exercised the critics and have led them to some smaller excisions, — it is impossible to avoid the conviction that the whole scene is a crudely executed addition to the original play. It contains no new information except the wholly needless prediction of the catastrophe (64 ff.). This prediction itself betrays the bungler. If Apollo knows that Alcestis is to be rescued, why the preceding appeal to the death-god's clemency? The composer of the scene, I suspect to have been some *τεχνίτης* of the Macedonian epoch, who desired to win applause by swaggering about the scene with a large sword. He derived the hint from the *πτερωτός* Ἄιδας whom Alcestis sees in her dying vision.

This scene retrenched, there remains a prologue of an ordinary Euripidean type, — that in which the exposition is made by a *πρόσωπον προτακόν*. Exact counterparts are found in the *Hippolytus* and the *Ion*, where this personage is a god. The genuine part of Apollo's speech ends with verse 23, *λείπω μέλαθρων τήνδε φιλότατην στέγην*. This ending is somewhat abrupt, and it is likely that the original prologue has been docked in attaching the addition. The god may, for instance, have given an intimation of the approach of

¹ [Mr. Allen later felt doubt as to the force of this argument. In a note found among his papers he cites the *Hercules Furens*, and queries how, in this play, the bodies were removed from the house, and what the supposed scene was. He notes, also, that Lyssa, in the play, goes into the house, but does not come out; she is, however, not heard of again.]

the chorus, or of his own destination, or he may have spoken some farewell words to the palace, to supplement the rather bald and meaningless address in verses 1 and 2. I understand that Apollo comes out of the palace at the beginning of the play, and I like best to suppose that he is still in the service of Admetus, or is just leaving that service. Accordingly I would refer ἐς τὸδ' ἡμέρας (9) to both the verbs just preceding. The presence of a god in a mortal's dwelling is thus easiest explained. We may, indeed, suppose merely a friendly visit, but in that case he must have come unseen by the family, for the slave in her narrative of the morning's events (152-212) makes no mention of such a visit.

Finally¹ I may point out something that may be a confirmation of my view. Macrobius² quotes the Virgilian commentator *Cornutus*, who had said that "nobody knew whence Virgil took the idea of cutting off the lock of one about to die." Macrobius is ashamed that one so versed in Greek letters should not know the familiar play of *Alceſtis*, where Orcus is sent to do this. But what if Cornutus had read the *Alceſtis*, but without this scene?

Servius, who has an abridgment of the same statement,³ adds that Euripides got this scene from 'Poenia,' an 'antiquus tragicus' (Phrynichus). Did the interpolator take it from this source?

¹ [The following is postscript to Mr. Allen's manuscript.]

² Macrob. *Sat.* v. 19. 2. "Hanc Vergilius non de nihilo fabulam fingit, sicut uir alius doctissimus Cornutus existimat, qui annotationem eiusmodi adposuit uersibus 'Unde haec historia ut crinis auferendus sit morientibus, ignoratur.' . . . Haec Cornutus : sed me pudet quod tantus uir, Graecarum etiam doctissimus litterarum, ignorauit Euripidis nobilissimam fabulam Alceſtim. In hac enim fabula in scenam Orcus inducitur gladium gestans quo crinem abscidat Alceſtidis et sic loquitur : ἡ δ' οἶν γυνή," etc.

³ Serv. Dan. *Aen.* IV. 694. "Alii dicunt Euripidem Orcum in scenam inducere gladium ferentem quo crinem Alceſti abscidat : Euripidam hoc a Poenia antiquo tragico, mutuatum." — The Ἀλκιστῆς of Phrynichus is known from Hesych., s.v. ἀθαμβῆς.